

Dear Andy Stanley

Dear Andy Stanley,

This letter is in response to your December 4th sermon entitled “Who Needs Christmas”. While I have not heard your sermon, I have read about your sermon and some of the content of the message in the following article from CBN News.

First of all, I want to begin by providing a background of myself. I am a seminary student at Luther Rice College and Seminary completing a Master of Divinity in Biblical Languages this semester (in which I have taken two years of Greek and Hebrew simultaneously), and upon graduation plan to complete a Ph D in Systematic Theology for the ministry goal of teaching Systematic Theology in Bible colleges and seminaries. I am also a long-time viewer of In Touch with Charles Stanley, and I have enormous respect for your father’s ministry and have had the privilege of visiting both First Baptist Church of Atlanta and the In Touch Ministries global headquarters in Atlanta and meeting your father on numerous occasions. You are blessed beyond measure to have such a faithful father in the Christian faith and one who is leaving a legacy of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

Before getting into the discussion on Christmas and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, I want to affirm that the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundational doctrine of the Christian faith, as Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, stated in his letter to the church at Corinth, “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:17). We do not serve a Savior who is dead and in the grave (as are the leaders of other world religions). We serve the risen, alive Savior as the beautiful hymn of the ages “He Lives” proclaims.

With that said, I wish to address your comments about the virgin birth of Jesus Christ made in your message. Your first comment states: “If somebody can predict their own death and resurrection, I’m not all that concerned about how they got into the world.”

My short response is, “I am (concerned).”

Your other comment on the subject is: “Christianity doesn’t hinge on the truth or even the stories around the birth of Jesus.”

My short response is, “Actually, it does.”

Now for a longer response...

Why is the virgin birth of Jesus Christ a fundamental and foundational doctrine of the Christian faith? Allow me to briefly examine the concept of the virgin birth:

In terms of the virgin aspect of the virgin birth, Jesus Christ being born of a virgin is absolutely foundational to the Christian faith. If Jesus Christ were not born of a virgin, then He is not the Son of God, not God Incarnate. If Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, God Incarnate, then He had

a human father. If Jesus Christ had a human father, then He had a sin nature. If Jesus Christ had a sin nature, then He did not die on the cross for the sins of all humanity. If Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for the sins of all humanity, then every “Christian believer” who has trusted Jesus Christ as the Savior of all our sins is still lost and dead in our sins because Jesus Christ would be incapable of taking away the sins of all humanity, rendering our faith in vain. No virgin birth would mean that Jesus Christ Himself would have sinned (possessing a sin nature), in which He would only have been capable of dying for His own sins, not the sins of all humanity. It reduces every aspect of the Christian faith to a mere fable or farce.

Yet the Word of God affirms Jesus Christ is born of a virgin, and that He is the sinless Savior who has taken away the sins of all humanity. Isaiah prophesied ages before that blessed evening in Bethlehem, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, And shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14). John the Baptist proclaimed, The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29). In John’s epistle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he writes, “And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” (1 John 3:5). The author of Hebrews, inspired by the Holy Spirit, also writes, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15). Such a Savior that can atone for the sins of all humanity can only be born of a virgin.

In terms of the birth aspect of the virgin birth, an incarnation had to take place in order for Jesus Christ to atone for our sins as much as being born of a virgin. The Savior of the sins of humanity could not have been a mere docetic spirit being. He had to take on and become humanity in order to be the atoning substitute for the sins of humanity. John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in His Gospel, stated it beautifully: “And the Word was made flesh [that is, God took on humanity through the incarnation of Jesus Christ], and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, bracketed text mine), and Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote to the church of Corinth, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

If Jesus Christ were not born of a virgin, He would be fully human and not God and incapable of atoning for the sins of all humanity. If Jesus Christ were not incarnated through the virgin birth and took on humanity through the incarnation, He would be fully God and not man and unable to die on a cross for the sins of all humanity. Only a Savior who is both fully God and fully man, in a blessed hypostatic union in one individual, born of a virgin, is capable of being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of all humanity. The words virgin birth are the two most beautiful words describing the act by which God came to earth, became a man yet without sin, and became our Savior who died on the cross for the sins of all humanity. It is not a “myth” invented to give Jesus “street cred”. It is the glorious act by which Jesus Christ entered into the world to become the Savior of the world.

On one end, the virgin birth is the only rational understanding of how Jesus Christ was able to come to the earth as both fully God and fully man as sinless God Incarnate to atone for the sins of all humanity. On the other end, I do not understand all of the mechanics of the virgin birth, neither do I need to in order to accept the virgin birth by faith. As God told the prophet Isaiah,

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9). There is much of God’s Word that even as a mature Christian who has studied the Word of God for years still does not fully comprehend, and some which I will never fully comprehend on this side of eternity, as I am but a mere finite mind compared to the infinite mind of holy God. Yet I am comforted by the words of my Savior as written in Matthew’s Gospel account, inspired by the Holy Spirit, when he writes, “But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26). With God, all things are possible, including the virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and all of His wonderful works, whether I fully understand them or do not fully understand them and must believe them by faith.

In terms of Mark’s Gospel and John’s Gospel not giving an account of the birth of Jesus Christ, why would they? Mark’s Gospel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is to present Jesus as the Son of God. John’s Gospel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is to present Jesus as the Word who is God incarnate (and John briefly touches on the “birth” of Jesus Christ by showing how the Word took on flesh during His incarnation). Both present portraits of Jesus Christ that need not go through a birth narrative, as a birth narrative would be contrary to the portraits of Jesus Christ these two Gospel writers inspired by the Holy Spirit would present.

If the title of your sermon “Who Needs Christmas”, was a question, allow me to conclude by answering “Who needs Christmas?”. Everyone on the face of the earth needs Christmas. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. We need a Savior who came into this world, born of a virgin, God Incarnate, who took away the sins of all humanity. For Christmas, I invite everyone to unwrap the greatest Christmas Gift of all, a Gift not wrapped in gold foil, but wrapped in swaddling clothes, a Gift not lying under a tree, but lying in a manger, and later nailed to a tree, a Gift not purchased with silver or gold, but purchased with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. This is the most precious Christmas Present anyone could receive for Christmas.”

To the glory of God and to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior,

Nathan Parker